Ari Was Her Guiding Light

How Jackie Coped With JFK's 'Affairs'

JACKIE'S PUBLIC appearances never revealed the turmoil in her seemingly perfect marriage to JFK.

JUDITH EXNER'S association with JFK has opened up a whole new chapter on Kennedy while he was President.

IT SEEMS John F. Kennedy wasn't always as dedicated to his marriage as his public image seemed to indicate.

By HARRY ALTSHULER
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The parade of President John F. Kennedy's women friends through the White House bedrooms so enraged his wife that at one time Jackie fled Washington, determined never to return.

Only the combination of radioed demands from JFK and gentle, worldly-wise advice from Ari Onassis, on whose yacht "Christina" she was cruising in the Mediterranean, made her go back.

The story has finally been revealed by a longtime male friend of Onassis, who learned the details shortly before the Greek billionaire's last illness.

"Ari had never told anyone, but in his last days he felt he had to unburden himself," this friend told MIDNIGHT in an exclusive interview.

"I myself would never reveal what he told me except that now so much has come out about Kennedy's amours that I must set the record straight to protect two people: Ari and Jackie.

"Jackie knew quite well what was going on in the White House — and what was going on wherever JFK traveled as well. She was in despair over the state of her marriage.

"Then her sister Lee Radziwill, fearing Jackie was heading for a nervous breakdown, arranged the holiday on the 'Christina' with her friend Onassis."

At that time, in the summer of 1963, Jackie was mourning the loss of her infant son Patrick and was in low spirits, while more and more JFK's romantic antics forced themselves on her attention.

Once she found a woman's undergarment stuffed in a White House pillowslip. "Would you please shop around and see who these belong to?" she asked her husband icily. "They're not my size."

Everyone around the White House knew the score: there were two girls on the secretarial staff with no visible duties, code-named by the Secret Service "Fiddle" and "Faddle." When the President traveled, they were nearby.

There were the frequent phone calls and White House luncheons now admitted by sultry Judith Campbell Exner, who at the same time was the close friend of two big-time Chicago mobsters.

There were the movie stars who fascinated JFK, and were pleased to be his friends. Actress Jayne Mansfield told friends she had an affair with Kennedy. And the same has been said openly about Marilyn Monroe. Other names that are mentioned — though they deny anything improper — are Angie Dickinson, Kim Novak, Rhonda Fleming and Janet Leigh.

And there were airline stewardesses and others, more than willing to be close to the President.

Ari's friend told MIDNIGHT:

"Without planning to do so, Jackie spilled out her broken heart to Onassis.

"There were tears in Jackie's eyes when she told of the rocking chair JFK gave to an English actress, Shirley Anne Field.

"Jackie said she had no plans for going back to the U.S. soon — if ever.

"Ari walked the deck with her under the Mediterranean moon — and did just the opposite of what you might expect.

"Instead of taking any advantage of her emotional state, he told her, 'You are making a mistake. You must not leave your husband, certainly not while he is President.

"It would create a scandal which would hurt your country. You have a responsibility. Learn to live with the thing and create a facade. Steel yourself.

"Ari explained to her, **"A man like your husband is subject to immense strains. The fate of the world is on his shoulders. Some men turn to drink; some can relax only in the company of women. It doesn't mean he no longer loves you.'**

"As the holiday stretched on, gossip was beginning in Washington — rumors of a marital rift in the White House.

"The radioed messages from JFK became more frequent and urgent: Now he was demanding Jackie's immediate return.

"At the same time, the Justice Department began a not-very-subtle investigation of Ari's tax status in the United States.

"Ari understood. He told Jackie gently, 'You can stay as long as you wish — even though the ship is due for overhaul and refitting now, but don't let that disturb you if you want to remain...' "

Ari's friend continued: "It was this combination of pressures that sent Jackie back to her husband and placed her at his side when Kennedy was assassinated only a few short months later.

"She knew she would never have forgiven herself if she had not come back. And she told Ari later, 'I will always be in your debt.'

"That explains why, when he felt the time came to propose marriage, she was willing to listen to him."

And it explains what the world has never understood: why she became Jackie Onassis.

GLAMOROUS STARS such as (from left) Jayne Mansfield, Janet Leigh, Rhonda Fleming, Marilyn Monroe, Kim Novak and Angie Dickinson are said to have fascinated the late president.